Le·Hi·Ho·News

Vol. XIV, No. 8 Happy Holidays December 1983

Lesbian Mothers

by Cynthis by Cynthia Fiore

While it may seem as though the words "lesbian mother" are mutually exclusive, that appearance couldn't be farther from the truth. Even in this valley, I'm sure everyone at least knows of one lesbian who has children While you may not know anything else about her. . .you are aware that she's got kids.

It was after I became a lesbian mother that I realized there is next to no networking among us and there is little to no representation of us in the gay community. To say that we as lesbian mothers are no different from our single sisters is a half truth. To be gay and not be represented by the fact that we have prime responsibilities aside from our own (well being) persons and by the fact that practically everything we do affects another much younger, more vulnerable existence is callous.

Hopefully, after reading about some of our experiences, one will at least see depth to the character, if not recognize a need for support where there is none.

Out of what I see as a necessity, I must first begin by dispelling the myth that every lesbian mother must have been straight at one time. "I mean you've got a kid don't ya?" While it may be true now that a majority of lesbian mothers were heterosexual during conception, that leaves out the woman who is gay and wants to have a child.

There are many ways a lesbian can make her entrance into motherhood. Maybe the most publicized method is artificial insemination. This service is available to unmarried women with no question of their sexuality. There is also adoption through an agency. While it is true that a homosexual may not legally adopt, a single woman that is capable of meeting the financial criteria and passing the personal screening involved can adopt a child. If she happens to be gay, then she becomes another voiceless lesbian mother. A lesbian may also choose a male, gay or straight,

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Alcoholism

The holiday season, a time of joy for many, is one of the hardest times of the year for the gay/lesbian alcoholic. John Frauncis, therapist from Chit Chat Farms in Berks County, has worked with alcoholics since 1973. He spoke to the November meeting of Le-Hi-Ho.

Alcoholism is the most common illness in this country and it's just one form of addiction. Frauncis defines an alcoholic as a person who cannot live comfortable without drinking. Alcohol is a drug, a mood elevator that addicts believe makes a difference.

Low self-esteem, guilt, denial, loneliness, fear of rejection, anger and lack of responsibility are all characteristics of the alcoholic. Frauncis attributes much of the 30% rate of drug and alcohol problems within the gay/lesbian community to its emphasis on socialization in bars. Higher addiction rates are noted among other guilt ridden groups such as Jews and Irish.

BYLINE

The year is drawing to a close. I still find it hard to believe it's 1983, yet alone almost 1984. It has been a busy and productive year for the lesbian/gay community. Looking back, I recall the first women's softball team, the first Metropolitan Community Church meetings, the first Parents of Gays group, the Task Force to establish a gay/lesbian community center and its highly successful benefit, outreach to other groups such as Women, Inc., having a bar sponsor a bus to New York's Gay Pride Day, concern with anti-gay/lesbian violence through representation of the Task Force Against Violence and contacting the National Gay Task Force to coordinate efforts with their own project, working with the Philadelphia AIDS Task Force to provide information to the community on AIDS, working with St. Luke's Hospital to add a tape on AIDS to its Tel-Med information service, starting outreach to physicians who have AIDS patients, working with local newspapers to provide information on how AIDS is affecting the gay/lesbian community, the First Annual Gay and Lesbian Picnic at Kuhns Grove, the first women's radio program with an emphasis on lesbian/feminist music, the first gay radio news program, representation on the Governor's Council on Sexual Minorities, an expanded Le-Hi-Ho News with major advertising support by sympathetic businesses, the first major grant by a non-gay group to a lesbian/gay organization, having a booth at Allentown's Super Sunday, sponsoring a Christmas party for Allentown's homeless street people. It's been quite a year.

I doubt there's an area our size in the country that has started so much in so short a time. Now it's time to consolidate these gains, making sure they survive and grow. A true community is growing in Allentown and the special thing about it is that gay men and lesbians are starting to work not just with each other, as important as that is, but also with others in the wider community who support what we are doing.

For a long time, perhaps due to my own insecurity and fear, I thought that withdrawing into a separate world was the key to gay pride, that we were unique and special and to hell with the rest. But it won't work. It won't work because sexuality is just one part of our lives. Look around you; how many people do you actually like just because they are gay men and women? There are parts of ourselves that reach out beyond sexuality and I feel they are probably the deepest parts of our being. It's important to be gay. It's more important to be alive. Have a very special holiday season. From the staff of the Le-Hi-Ho-Ho-Ho, Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukah and a good solstice.

Donald Graves M.S.

A new support group for men under 35 is now forming.

867-7286

A support group for men over 35 is now forming.

Le-Hi-Ho-News

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Lesbian Mothers (cont.)

with or without his consent (knowledge) to intentionally impregnate her. Then, there is also the unintentional pregnancy (yes, it happens).

I was in the military. I was coming up to a witch hunt that I had no chance of surviving (my lover turned me in!). I wasn't ready to be discharged at that point, so I got a boyfriend--immediately. He was gay; I was gay. We were a great cover for one another. Probably too great a cover; I became pregnant. I chose, for numerous reasons, to continue the pregnancy. I, knowing all the while that I was and will always be gay, conceived and gave birth to a child.

I happen to take a personal offense at being assumed to have been straight because I have a child. I interpret this automatic assumption as yet another putdown to being a woman, as another denial of my sexuality regarding women. Having had to've been straight is a myth.

One woman interviewed is no exception though. Rose, 37, out 1½ years, was definitely heterosexual for 35 years. I asked her if she knew about lesbianism during those heterosexual years--that lesbians existed and she looked at me incredulously and replied "I DO read!"

I had been under the misimpression that these late comers had just been unaware. Rose opened up my thinking. "No one is going to define my sexuality to me. My preference and choice is women. The qualities that I admire most in people come with women." What are those qualities? "The important things to me are sensitivity, honesty, humor and vulnerability."

Rose met a woman and fell in love; the woman's sex became inconsequential as the relationship developed and grew. She came out; many of her gay friends told her they knew it all along. At the onset of this first lesbian relationship, she was rather hesitant regarding the change because of her children. They had been through two divorces but Rose has since concerned herself with using good judgment and discretion in her gay live at the house.

Rose is a single parent. I asked her if she had any trouble with lovers because she has children. "No. I suppose I'm lucky; I know wonderful women. They think my kids are great. Most of them don't have kids themselves so they want to know how we get along; they want to know all about them." Rose does, however, make concessions because of her youngest child, in the way of staying at home more than she would choose and by not spending long weekends away from the home. "But then kids cut into your sex life no matter. . ."

The lesbian mother is not totally alone when it comes to misrepresentation. What about the lover who mothers the children born by the lesbian mother? Often she has a close, personal attachment to the children. Both parties affect one anothers lives.

An interviewee's lover said, "I have a ready-made family. If I want an outlet for those mothering feelings, I have her kids. . . .it is neat. I'm like a mother figure once removed." She is and always has been included in activities between the mother and children.

In the interviews where there was a "permanent" lover, she has had equal say when it comes to discipline and the kids respect her authority. One woman told me "They'd better!"

I can't help remembering a party where the lover went home early to check on the kids. That type of devotion is beautiful.

I also can't help but wonder though whether couples that live apart from the children would be together if the children lived with them under the same roof. How many single lesbians out there have at one time or another said they'd have to seriously think twice about becoming involved with someone who has kids? Would you weigh the options as seriously before allowing a relationship to develop if the same woman, instead of having two children, had a responsible but well-paying job that might require of her overtime or home-

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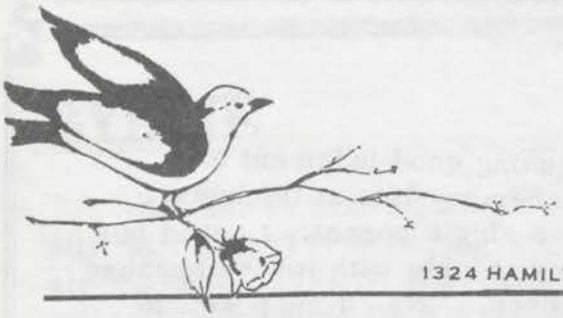

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"The combination of flowers or fruit with a bottle of wine or liqueur is perfect for the cheerful and festive holiday season. It's a beautiful, as well as thoughtful gift because you pick out the type of wine or liqueur to include in the basket of cheer," notes Jeff Lewis, design manager.

Jeff notes that the baskets of cheer are easy to order too! Just drop off your favorite choice of wine or liqueur or other spirits, and we'll do the rest. (For a small additional charge we'll shop for the spirits for you!)

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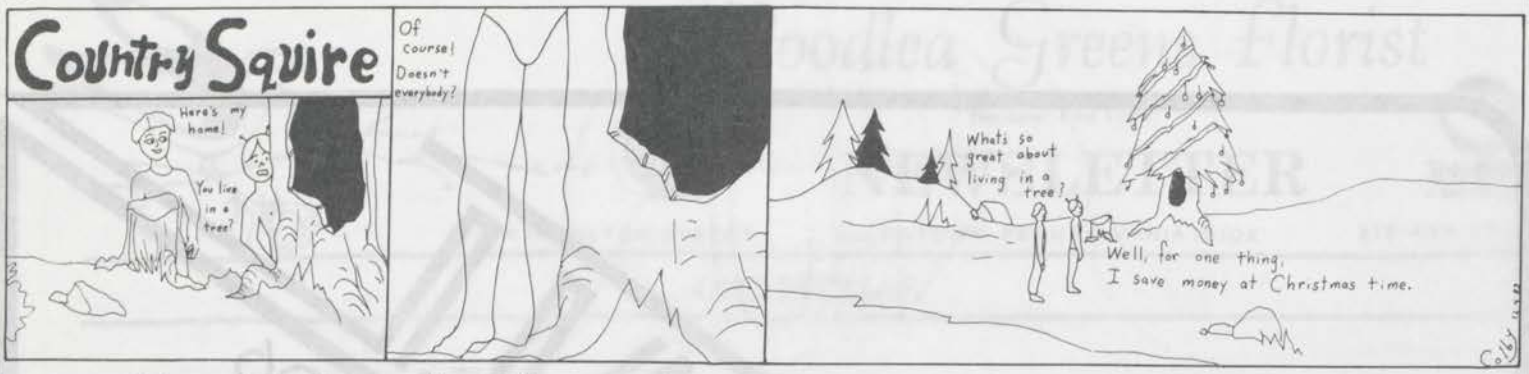

Lesbian Mothers (cont.)

work or out of town trips or sudden relocation? I'm appalled by fellow women regarding and therefore treating motherhood as being out of the mainstream of lesbianism.

Is growing roots something lesbians are afraid of? If so, why is it then that many lesbians talk not of having fun and having gloriously uninhibited sex but rather of forming a lasting relationship and belonging solely to another person? Single, unattached women generally tend to try to find or create a homebase, a haven they can call home, so what is the big, avoidable deal with children? They take up time that could be devoted solely to pleasing the partner. They take up money that could be relished on entertainment. How self-centered and self-serving will we allow ourselves to become? I am forced to question the true ability to love from a lesbian who has given me these reasons.

Our children have such an explosive impact on the way we lead our lives that to continue to ignore or underestimate this unique situation among us, as members of sisterhood and of a community is to perpetuate the wonderwoman "I can have it all" super-myth. Light must be shed on the fact that we, as lesbian mothers, have different needs to be met. I am suggesting that we organize and begin to address our own needs.

Is gay motherhood, measured in terms of duties, different than the duties of straight motherhood? When this question was asked of eight women interviewed, all responded in the negative. There is no difference. Physical needs must be met no matter what the mother's sexual identity. The difference lies in the ways a gay mother carries on her personal private life.

Alcoholism, cont.

Alcoholism is a progressively deteriorating disease and irreversible in the sense that an alcoholic never loses the desire to drink but can learn how to cope with that desire. Such physical damage as may occur is rarely permanent but work must be done in emotional, social and spiritual areas.

One of the most devastating effects of alcoholism is that it is contagious, the alcoholic affects those around him or her, making them also mentally confused and emotionally upset. These are most often the ones who care for the alcoholic the most.

Alcoholism is treatable, through special programs like Chit Chat Farms and through Alcoholics Anonymous, whose 12 steps enable a person to begin the long haul back to a life of respect and care, both for the alcoholic and those who are concerned about him or her.

Those interested in an alcohol program can contact the Drug and Alcohol Intake Unit at 432-3986. A gay Alcoholics Anonymous group meets at the Church of the Mediator, 1620 Turner Street in Allentown every Tuesday night. Al-A-Non, for those around the alcoholic, can be reached at 434-0614.

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NEWSLINE

. . . The Governing Council on Sexual Minorities had its first meeting this year on November 29 in Harrisburg. Unique in the country at its conception under former Gov. Milton Shapp's administration, the council remains a model for supporting rights for sexual minorities.

A priority of the Council will be working with LEAD (Legislative Equality Action Drive) to amend the state's Human Relations Act to include protection for sexual preference. The act covers employment, public accommodations, schools and housing. LEAD will be coordinating a coalition of civil rights groups, unions, gay and lesbian groups and represenatives of the elderly and handicapped to form broad based support for the new bill.

Now that Philadelphia and Harrisburg have passed protective gay and lesbian rights bills (and there may soon be a third, more on this next issue), it's thought time for statewide protection. Sixteen states are working on such legislation, Massachusetts for more than 10 years. Our own gay rights bill, House Bill 2220, was presented to the Pennsylvania assembly first in 1976.

The Council also plans on working with the National Gay Task Force's violence project, which is documenting anti-gay and lesbian violence nationwide. The Lehigh Valley is the only Pennsylvania area to have begun such an anti-gay violence program. Le-Hi-Ho is a member of the Task Force Against Violence, a coalition of concerned agencies and programs whose purpose is to educate the community about the extent of violence against straight and gay men and women.

The Council has not fared well under Gov. Thornburgh's administration. The governor has made no new appointments to the Council since he took office, though the Lehigh Valley is now unofficially represented on it. The Council has official representatives from various state agencies such as the Department of Health and the Human Relations Commission. The past president of Pennsylvania NOW and the newly elected president, Mary Nancarrow, serve on the Council.

. . . The recent Philadelphia election of W. Wilson Goode as Philadelphia's new mayor has sparked great hope with the gay and lesbian community for increasing visibility in city government.

Before his election, Goode accepted with little change a position paper on gay and lesbian concerns prepared by major community leaders supporting his candidacy. Among the items promised by Goode include an executive order on the day he takes office forbidding discrimination against gay men and women in city employment and services and within companies that contract for city services; appointing open lesbians and gays to high level city offices; city support for a lesbian and gay pride proclamation; increased health services for AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases; sensitization and accountability of the police department regarding anti-gay and lesbian violence and establishment of a Commission for Sexual Minorities. However, it must also be admitted that Goode specifically did not thank the gay/lesbian community for its support to his election in his acceptance speech, while thanking women, blacks and Hispanics for voting for him.

. . . CUAF, the Church Urban Action Fund for the Lehigh Valley, has approved a $2,000 operating grant to the Task Force towards the first year's operation of the Lesbian/Gay Community Center. The grant application stressed the need for a community center to serve gay men and women in a variety of ways, as the Jewish, Black and Hispanic communities already are doing. Approving the grant was a major step for a mainstream religious group to take and we applaud their recognition and support for our community.

. . . A new AIDS related death has occurred at St. Luke's Hospital in Bethlehem.

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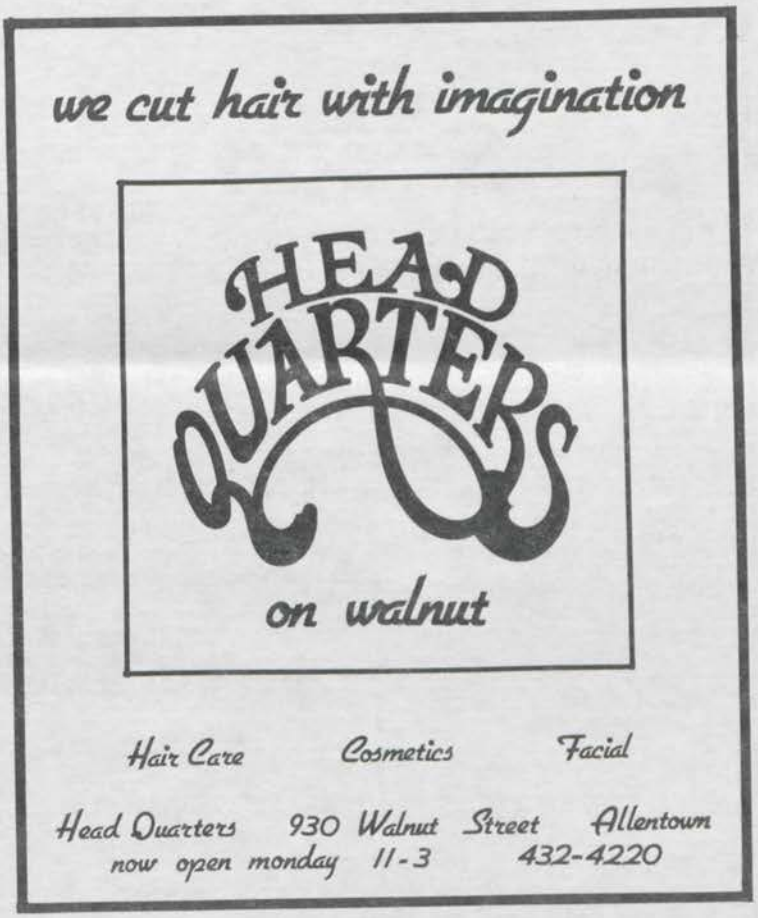

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